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## THE PLEA FOR EIGHT HOURS.

BY T. V. POWDERLY, GENERAL MASTER WORKMAN OF THE  
KNIGHTS OF LABOR.

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ONE of the principles of organized labor is to "reduce the hours of labor to eight per day," and at the present time there is an agitation going on throughout the United States and England which has for its object the accomplishment of this looked-for result.

All employers of labor claim to be workers ; they assert that they have to toil as wearily as do the men whom they employ. They will tell the advocate of the short-hour work-day that there is no necessity for a shortening of the hours of labor, and that a man should be allowed to work as long as he pleases. That all employers are workers is true, but there is this difference between them and their employees: the employer may work one hour or ten as he pleases; the workman must work whether it pleases him or not. The employer enjoys a profit on each hour of labor performed by the employee, while the latter has no share in the profit whatever; he simply receives all that he can wrest from his employer. Competition obliges the humane employer to adopt the same methods as the skinflint, or go out of business, and, as a consequence, the lowest rate of compensation for which men will work is all that he will pay. Justice seldom enters into the adjustment of wages: necessity is the standard by which they are regulated.

Previous to 1825 men worked "from sun-up to sun-down," and they saw but little of their homes on what was then rigidly observed as "the Sabbath." The adornment of the home gave the head of the family no concern, for he spent but a short time in the house. He knew but little of the wants of the household except those that pertained to food ; and to the fact that he went forth for the purpose of supplying the family with food we owe

the term "bread-winner" as applied to the laborer. To be a bread-winner was all that the workman of the last century aspired to ; and yet he grew tired of the contest, for it brought him but a scanty portion of what he struggled for. In 1825, the agitation for the establishment of the ten-hour system began, and it continued until it was officially recognized by the President of the United States in 1840. Strikes, contentions, disputes, and, very often, bloodshed, at length brought the ten-hour system into operation, and with its final adoption the workman became ambitious of being more than a bread-winner.

The steam railroad was then courting commercial acquaintance, and in rapid sequence came the telegraph, the lightning-express train, and the daily paper, with its record of yesterday's proceedings. Invention took new life in every department of trade and industry, and we now find ourselves able to do in a minute what it formerly required hours to perform. Since 1840 the agencies of production have gained a power and force that were not deemed possible during the years which rolled between the dawn of the Christian era and that date. Previous to that time brain work was not supposed to be entitled to any more consideration than hand labor, so far as the hours of service were concerned. Until recent years it was not supposed that the clerk or the employee of the counting-house should remain at his post a shorter number of hours than the mechanic or the laborer. What was wanted in order to allow all men to labor was light, and the light came.

Fewer hours of toil mean more time to read, and after the adoption of the ten-hour system the workman took more of interest in the press of the land; he had more time to read; and, that fact once established, it became a paying investment to advertise in "the papers." The number of papers began to increase, for the masses had more time to read; having more time to read, they learned what was going on throughout the world, and they naturally acquired new tastes and desires. The adornment of the home became an object with the man who could see his home by daylight, and the demand for articles of home consumption and adornment increased very rapidly. The "oldest inhabitant" has only to travel back some fifty years in memory to see a house with bare floors from cellar to garret, sawed-off stumps serving as chairs, stone dishes on the table, and sheepskins for blankets. He will

remember that the workman of that day lived in a log hut, and that he had to stuff the cracks with fresh mud every fall ; that a coat of whitewash was a luxury, and that corned beef and cabbage were regarded as delicacies. It was very easy to supply these wants, and had men continued to work on for as many hours as they were able, they would never have dreamed of improving their condition.

That the condition of the workman has improved wonderfully is true, but to no one can the credit of this be given save the workman himself. He alone sought for the means of improvement, and his every step has been contested by those for whom he toiled, and by others who never gave a thought to his surroundings. It is true that philosophers and philanthropists have spoken in favor of the "man who worked," but their pleadings and writings had no more effect on the minds of the wealth-getters than has a zephyr on the Eiffel Tower. To look back at the sanitary condition of the workman's home and surroundings is to learn that, if he had had to work on the inside of factory walls at that period, he would have lived but half as long as at the present time. If the man who lived in a log hut, where "the wind whistled through the chinks," was obliged to work in the stifling atmosphere of the present-day factory, he would die of lung trouble in a very short time. Workshop, means of transportation, dwellings, and every surrounding have changed, and for the better.

Too many advocates of the eight-hour day are in ignorance of the vital principle which underlies the agitation. They argue in this fashion : If the hours of labor are cut down to eight, the idle men who have flocked to this country will be employed, and we shall be correspondingly happy. Following that course of reasoning to its logical conclusion, we should have to cut down the hours of labor still further in a few years to accommodate the idle thousands imported to this country by steam and railway companies ; and after the number of the unemployed increased again, we should have to reduce the hours of labor again and again until the unemployed of Europe and of Asia had landed, when we should have nothing to do.

On higher ground does the sincere advocate of the short-hour work-day base his agitation. The final solution of the work-day problem will come when the workman becomes a sharer in what he creates. To-day the laborer is considered by his employer to

be no more a factor in the field of production than the spade which he handles. The laborer has no other interest in the work he performs than to draw pay for the work done at the end of the week or month. Workman and employer find their interests to be identical in but one particular—to get the most out of each other.

Take an employer who gives work to one hundred men. The value of their labor we will rate at \$2 a day. He pays them an average of \$1 a day each. His profits will equal the total wages paid, and in twenty years he may retire a wealthy man. How fares it with his workmen? They remain poor and retire only to the poor-house or the cemetery. What do the riches of the one represent? Unpaid labor. To labor, then, belong the vast sums that rich men leave after them to erect poor-houses and charitable institutions, which would not be necessary if the workmen were paid what they earned.

We have the Moses Taylor Hospital in Scranton, to which the miners of this valley will be admitted upon receiving injuries in the mines. That hospital represents \$300,000 of their own earnings, which by right belongs to them; and yet they must enter its door as objects of charity because an unjust system enabled one man to rob them of that sum. Had the miners of this valley been sharers from the beginning in the earnings of the mines, had they received a just share of the profits which their labor created, they would to-day be in a position of independence, and when misfortune overtook them they would not have to seek admittance, for sweet charity's sake, within walls every brick of which is cemented in their own sweat and blood. Had they been sharers in the profits, every hour of toil performed by them would be an hour of profit also, and they would find pleasure in working as many hours as they desired. They would work as they pleased, and would not be driven to it. The incentive to labor for something more than a master would be there, and each one would be a part of that which he created. Until such a day as that comes we must agitate for shorter hours of toil, so that men may have the time to prepare for the system of the future.

No one now thinks of requiring the bank clerk to work ten hours, or even eight. His mind would not stand the strain, and the physical part would also decay. The work of the future will be scientific in its nature, and will call for more exercise of the brain than of the hand. Witness the rapidity with which

women are being crowded into the places made vacant by men, and we realize that it is no longer strength, but skill, that is required. No man or woman can work as long at an occupation which requires skill as at one which calls for no exercise of the mental powers. Turn to statistics, and it will be seen that the mechanic dies many years in advance of the day-laborer. One exercises the muscles alone ; the other exercises brain and muscle. The double wear ends existence more quickly. Brain work will soon be required in all callings, and if for no other than a sanitary reason, the hours of labor should be reduced to the eight-hour standard.

Men who work short hours are better educated than those who do not; they have more time in which to study. A thinking, studious man will learn that overexertion shortens life, and he will guard against it. Thousands go to early graves through overwork every year, and until the struggle for existence is shortened by cutting down the hours of toil, this condition of affairs will continue.

We see the miners and operators of the West combining to curtail the production of coal, and we see the farmers of the West burning corn and grain as fuel. We notice factories shutting down every now and then, and when we ask questions, we are told, "These periodical depressions must come every few years." These periodical depressions need not come every few years, and they would not come if we had an eight-hour work-day in existence and workmen were educated in the science of government. Capitalism cares but little how long men work ; its rule is grasping, and it drives whom it controls with pitiless spur. Must we look to Wall Street for reforms of any kind ? Even Wall Street itself will answer "No." Must we look to men whose every instinct is in the direction of acquiring extra millions for a relief from "periods of depression" ? Must we look to those who control the currency of the country for a proper system of finance ? If we do, things will grow worse, and in the end we must turn to the intelligence of the masses for a reform of the evils that are now growing upon us. How can the masses be educated if they are obliged to work long hours when they get a chance, and fret because they are idle during "periods of depression" which give the Anarchist the best of arguments and increase the number of his converts ?

The manufacturer complains that he must keep his factory running long hours in order to pay his taxes. He should study the question of taxing land for full value for use, and know that his improvements should not be taxed out of his hands. The manufacturer complains that he cannot pay the interest on borrowed capital unless he works his factory long hours. He should study the question of finance, and learn that his government, and not its enemies, should regulate and control the volume of currency, that it may become a circulating medium, instead of an interest-gathering machine. He complains of excessive freight charges, and declares that he must work long hours in order to meet his obligations. Let him unite with the Knights of Labor and the Farmers' Alliance in demanding that his government control the avenues of transportation and distribution. To study how to solve these problems, men must work fewer hours each day.

Should this much-desired reform be inaugurated by strikes? is asked. Not necessarily. In a given occupation or trade the employers and workmen throughout the country should agree on the establishment of the eight-hour work-day. To institute it by means of a strike in one part of the country would but place the short-hour employer at the mercy of his long-hour competitors. To demand the same rate of compensation for short hours as is now paid would be unjust. To rush the system through would unsettle affairs; and for that reason Knights of Labor ask for a gradual reduction of the hours of labor. We believe that, unless workmen are educated to understand the full and true reasons why their hours of labor should be reduced, they will not retain what they get; and for this reason we appeal to their reasoning powers rather than to their powers of endurance in case of a strike. Employers as well as workmen will soon realize that the short work-day will be the most beneficial. In any event its introduction will soon be announced.

T. V. POWDERLY.